



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Olympia, Washington 98504

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Dear Health Care Provider:

Antibiotic resistance continues to be a major public health concern. The Washington State Department of Health is joining with Washington Alliance Working for Antibiotic Resistance Education (AWARE) as part of our ongoing promotion of the judicious use of antibiotics. AWARE is a collaborative campaign of the Washington State Medical Association, Department of Health, most major health plans, including Regence BlueShield, Premera and Group Health Cooperative, and most medical specialty groups.

As in the past four years, we are making free educational materials available to help you in talking with your patients about appropriate use of antibiotics. Enclosed is a new order form. Please take this opportunity to order materials from our statewide campaign. This year we are offering a small color poster and additional Spanish translations. Of special note are the updated practice and prescribing guidelines for the most common respiratory tract infections, including a new one on community-acquired pneumonia.

A large number of Washington State practitioners participated in developing the updated, evidence-based guidelines. They are derived from CDC-sponsored published reviews and focus on accurate diagnosis, helping to distinguish which infections are most likely to benefit from antibiotics. The guidelines and educational materials emphasize the importance of patient-practitioner interaction and the need to provide patients with information and symptom control rather than antibiotics.

The greatest opportunity for reversing the upward trend in resistance is to capture as much as possible of the estimated 50 percent of antibiotics that are currently being used to treat viral infections. The flu season seems to be the time when many providers feel the most pressure from patients to prescribe antibiotics. In addition, we are facing a special situation this year with the media focus on anthrax, its flu-like symptoms, and stories about so-called preventive uses of antibiotics. This is an opportunity to reach out and educate so we do not lose the best weapons we have to fight deadly bacterial infections.

It is critical that we ensure the availability of effective antibiotic treatments. We encourage you to continue efforts to educate your patients about the appropriate use of antibiotics, and to prescribe them only when absolutely necessary. We value your thoughts, so please communicate your ideas on how we can improve the effectiveness of this effort.

Sincerely,

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